

**AMHERST PLANNING BOARD**  
**Wednesday, June 29, 2011 – 7:00 PM**  
**Town Room, Town Hall**  
**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Jonathan O’Keeffe, Acting Chair, Rob Crowner, Bruce Carson, Sandra Anderson, David Webber and Stephen Schreiber

**ABSENT:** Jonathan Shefftz, Richard Roznoy and Connie Kruger

**STAFF:** Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner

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Mr. O’Keeffe opened the meeting at 7:07 PM and announced that it was being recorded by Planning Department staff and recorded and broadcast by Amherst Media.

**I. JOINT MEETING - with Amherst Redevelopment Authority**

Mr. O’Keeffe introduced himself and opened the Joint Public Meeting with the Amherst Redevelopment Authority. He explained that Gianni Longo of ACP would be presenting work on the Gateway Corridor Vision and Next Steps. Mr. O’Keeffe disclosed that he was a resident of Butterfield Terrace, which is included in the area of the Gateway Project. He has checked with Town Counsel and the State Ethics Commission and has been told that there is no conflict of interest related to his participation in this planning process.

Members of the ARA who were present were John Coull, Peg Roberts, Aaron Hayden, Larry Kelly and Jeanne Traester.

Gianni Longo of ACP, with Karen Cullen, a consultant on urban renewal, gave the presentation. Mr. Longo noted that the process had been intense. He gave credit to the community for the vision that has evolved. The three parts of the process were:

- Public participation;
- Drafting of the Gateway Plan
- Assessing the urban renewal potential of the area

Mr. Longo described the five “Baseline Principles” that evolved out of the public process, as follows:

- Diversify Housing
- Respect Existing Neighborhoods
- Create a Vital Transition
- Increase Tax Revenues
- Adopt Sustainable Principles.

Mr. Longo described the three nights of meetings that were held. The first night was a charrette with about 100 people at 10 tables, redefining the boundaries of the project and making suggestions about the type, location and intensity of potential development. Each group gave a presentation of their findings. Three alternatives were developed from the charrette. The next night an open house was held for people to view and comment on the alternatives and talk to the consultants and each other. About 70 to 80 people attended. On the third night the team presented a vision for the Gateway Corridor. The boundaries had changed from the beginning of the process to include the Butterfield Terrace area and the areas to the west and to the east of Kendrick Park. The neighborhood to the west of the Gateway Corridor was excluded. A greater connection with the Town Center was established.

Mr. Longo stated that implementation of the plan over time would depend on market forces. The building types shown in the plan are interchangeable and flexible. Also, the building uses can change over time. He recommended that the town consider developing a form-based code for the Gateway Corridor area.

Mr. Longo described three basic areas of the Gateway Corridor, each with a distinctive character:

- The Town Center expansion area around Bertucci's and the Carriage Shops - this would be a continuation of the Town Center on the east side of Kendrick Park and primarily residential on the west side of Kendrick Park, with shops on the bottom and residential on top; the residential area on the west side of the Park would be a buffer between the new development and the residential neighborhood further to the west;
- The Gateway Hinge area around the intersection of Triangle Street and East Pleasant Street – this area might have three new buildings; they could have community uses, university uses and/or neighborhood uses; one of these could be a larger building with a modern style; this area could provide a chance for the students to meet the community; the “pedestrian shed” or the area that a pedestrian would be willing to walk would be about ¼ mile; the Gateway is envisioned as a walkable area.
- The Gateway Neighborhood area, stretching from just south of Fearing Street, going north to the University – this area would have reduced density compared to the first concept for Gateway; the Gateway Neighborhood area would be predominantly residential with some commercial uses; at Butterfield and North Pleasant Streets there could be a new green community space; the buildings would be mostly residential with the possibility of ground floor commercial space.

Mr. Longo reviewed the “Building and Land Use Breakdown” chart and noted that the numbers will change when the plan is more developed. He presented a summary of the numbers. He described the parking for Gateway as being behind rather than in front of the buildings. He mentioned using the “park once” methodology, where people can “park once” in a central location and walk to multiple stores and other business establishments. Residential parking would be adjacent to the dwelling units.

The street framework could be improved by expanding the grid to give people more choices about getting from one place to another. He described a typical street section and noted that North Pleasant Street now has the dimensions to create a “complete street”, including sidewalks and bike paths. He gave examples of two types of complete streets.

Mr. Longo mentioned that there is a “green framework” along the west edge of the Gateway Corridor. We can take advantage of the wetland areas there and create green areas with pedestrian walkways. This could help to protect the western residential areas from the more developed areas closer to the center of the Corridor.

Mr. Longo described demographic trends that show an increase in the number of baby-boomers and children of baby-boomers who are looking for smaller homes closer to and within walking distance of downtown areas, with a more urban environment and less maintenance. The new census figures confirm this, he said.

Karen Cullen discussed the urban renewal potential of the Gateway Corridor. She reviewed the material in the Draft Report. The consultants had assessed the Gateway Corridor for urban renewal eligibility. Ms. Cullen noted that there were particular definitions for words such as “blight” and “decadent”. She stated that some of the areas could be described as “decadent”, meaning that it was improbable that private enterprise would redevelop the area.

She referred to Chapter 121B of the Mass General Laws. Ms. Cullen showed on plans the areas that might be eligible for urban renewal and those that would not be eligible and she described the criteria used to assess these areas. She noted that there were parts of the Gateway Corridor area that had not been studied as part of this project, particularly along the west side of Kendrick Park and in the Bertucci's and Pray Street/Carriage Shops area. The case is weak for designating part of the area as eligible for urban renewal, she said. It may not be worth the time and expense to the town to designate these areas as urban renewal areas. She recommended next steps that could be taken if the town would like to pursue urban renewal eligibility.

Ms. Cullen noted that there are other tools that may accomplish the same thing:

- Mixed-use zoning;
- 43D priority development sites;
- Private/public partnerships;
- MassWorks grants;
- A variety of financing resources including DIF and TIF.

Redevelopment [urban renewal] is only one tool, she said.

John Coull, Chair of the ARA, disclosed that he is related to residents of Butterfield Terrace. He stated that the Gateway process had been initiated by an offer from the University. The action plan was taken up by the former Town Manager. The ARA will be meeting to determine how to proceed with this project and to evaluate the tools available. He announced that the meeting would be at 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. O'Keeffe invited the Boards to hold a dialogue about the project.

Ms. Roberts noted that there were different ways to respond to what grew out of this visioning process:

- Put the plan on the shelf and hope;
- Assume a leadership role and shepherd the vision to keep it alive.

If we don't plan we throw the future to chance, she said. Ms. Roberts noted that this had been a successful visioning process. There had been lots of listening to people's concerns. We need to look at the future, she said.

Mr. Schreiber commented that the plan appeared to be underdeveloped. He asked how it could be that a "catalyst project" could be primarily open space.

Mr. Longo noted that the plan confirms the residential nature of this area and provides open space for the neighborhood. There is no neighborhood focus now. The open spaces would be surrounded by different residential types.

Mr. Hayden thanked the Planning Board for hosting the presentation. He noted that the project requires collaboration. He appreciated the fact that plans for Kendrick Park had been included in the Gateway Corridor plans and supported the idea of building a community center. He noted that undergraduates will be arriving at UMass in larger numbers than in the past and that they would need to be accommodated. He praised the fact that the Gateway vision was pushing towards the downtown and suggested that it could catalyze support for downtown revitalization.

There was discussion about how to avoid negative effects on the downtown. Mr. Longo recommended using form-based code to focus on the character of the place. Form-based code will indicate variables and flexibility and describe what the town wants with regard to

the relationships between the sidewalks and the buildings. We could have flexible buildings where the ground floor can be used for residential use at first and for commercial use later on.

Mr. Coull noted that Mr. Longo's firm, ACP, had constructed a form-based code scenario for the Pray Street/Triangle Street area, during the Master Plan process. This document is available on the Master Plan webpage as "Urban Form Analysis". The code shows pictures of what the town wants in a certain area. Mr. Tucker noted that we will soon have a plan for form-based code for North Amherst and Atkins Corner, he said.

There is a website for the Form Based Code Institute. It has all types of information on form-based code. The uses can change over time but the form remains.

Ms. Anderson commented that Gateway needs to be connected to the UMass vision for the future. UMass is opening offices and support space on University Drive and may wish to have similar types of space in the Gateway Corridor.

Mr. Crouner asked about the expansion of the grid of streets north of Fearing Street. He asked how important this is to the residents of the area.

Mr. Tucker stated that there are wetlands that prevent the grid from going through in places. Programmatic changes to the area will change the pattern of movement. There is currently a collaborative effort to change patterns of movement by the town and UMass.

Mr. Longo stated that Phillips Street should go through to Sunset Avenue, however this needs to be negotiated and needs coordination with UMass. Massachusetts Avenue through UMass is now "un-walkable", he said.

Ms. Roberts and Mr. Tucker noted that the collaboration with UMass has thus far been very productive. Representatives of UMass have come to the ARA meetings and representatives of the town have participated in the UMass planning process.

Mr. Kelly commented that frat row had been a major embarrassment for the town and the university. Phillips Street is now a decadent area. It was ironic that taking down the frat houses had made the area ineligible for urban renewal.

Ms. Traester asked "what if UMass takes the property back" and doesn't go through with the plan to give the property to the town? She commented that the town needs to respect the University's time frame.

Members of the public commented as follows:

Judy Sechrest of 285 Lincoln Avenue asked how the Gateway Project would affect Lincoln Avenue. Mr. Tucker stated that the Gateway Project is focused on the area around North Pleasant Street. The town has been studying the Lincoln Avenue area as part of a separate project.

Louis Greenbaum of 298 Montague Road praised the ARA's achievements in Boltwood Walk. He was uneasy about transforming other parts of town that we know and love. He thanked Mr. Longo for considering the needs of the neighborhoods, but he was upset about the use of the words "blighted" and "decadent" to characterize neighborhoods in Amherst. He asked if this project belongs in the hands of the ARA.

Ms. Roberts observed that she has worked on the ARA for 25 years. The Gateway visioning process happened sensitively with public input. Talking to the public is part of the ARA's work and the ARA respects the public input that it receives. There was discussion about whether the ARA would be the body best equipped to carry this project forward.

John Fox of 90 Fearing Street thanked Mr. Longo for the presentation and noted that the town has limited resources for doing any of the planned development. He noted that areas for possible action were:

- Enforcement of housing and relevant codes in the neighborhood, including issuing citations;
- Collaboration with UMass regarding student behavior;
- Relocation of university offices to North Pleasant Street.

Mr. Fox noted that Fearing Street gets more traffic than Lincoln Avenue. He stated that he is hopeful, that there needs to be private sector involvement in the Gateway's development and that he is disappointed that the town does not plan to hire a new inspector until after it hires a new Building Commissioner. Mr. Tucker observed that enforcement has improved and is now quicker and that efforts are being made to strengthen the regulatory capacity of the town.

Alex Kent of 83 North Prospect Street stated that he was impressed with the vision report. He commented that the town has no food market. There should be a stronger emphasis on a food coop or a supermarket in town. Mr. Coull reminded the group that market forces are hard to control and that the ARA is not "all powerful". He noted that he agreed with what Mr. Fox had said.

Saul Perlmutter of Hillel House at the corner of Phillips and North Pleasant stated that his group is considering making capital investments in their property and wondered about the Gateway vision and whether it included replacing existing buildings. Mr. Longo explained that redevelopment would be driven by choices that property owners would make. The vision captures the potential of the area.

Alan Root of 33 Kellogg Avenue stated that this process had been positive and a good start; however the linkage between downtown and UMass had been pursued too quickly. The Master Plan for UMass is still not concluded. He commented on the "humane" architecture of the town. Mr. Hayden cautioned that the ARA needed to follow the rules. Its role would be to counter-balance destructive forces, he said. Mr. Coull said that the ARA would move "with deliberate speed".

Ludmilla Pavlova-Gillham of 350 Montague Road stated that she works in the Campus Planning Department at UMass and is a former Planning Board member. She encouraged the ARA and the Planning Board to extend the Gateway vision through the business district. She stated that citizens should envision what the town will be like 50 – 100 years from now. Mr. O'Keeffe acknowledged that the process is in the early stages and the intent is to eventually apply form-based code to the downtown area.

Molly Turner of Amity Street asked how the Gateway Project was started. What was its original purpose? What is the status of the frat row parcel? She asked about the logic of opening up and expanding the grid in the neighborhood. The expanded grid will expand the Phillips Street problem and the neighborhood needs code enforcement, she said. Mr. O'Keeffe stated that the frat row parcel currently belongs to UMass. The process began with discussions between the town and UMass regarding the frat row parcels and enlarged to include the public. Mr. Longo stated that the expanded street grid would ease traffic. Fearing Street is now the only street that connects east and west. An open grid would diffuse the traffic.

Ms. Turner stated that the town needs to work on reducing incentives to have automobiles.

Mr. Longo stated that there is a need to both extend connectivity and to discourage the use of cars. European cities have been making it difficult to have cars in the city for years.

Winifred Manning of 61 Fearing Street stated that she doesn't want people to have a through street to UMass. She recommended making it more attractive to use University Drive and Massachusetts Avenue. She noted that the left turn from Rocky Hill Road onto University Drive is difficult. Mr. Tucker stated that UMass is looking at alternative ways of getting people to and from campus. The University Drive intersection will be replaced. Right now the road is narrow and there are not enough lanes.

Denise Barberet of 67 North Whitney Street discussed the "parking question". She stated that there should be infill in the downtown and village centers, so that people could live, work and shop in the same area. There is a need for places to buy food and hardware. There is a need to improve the neighborhoods and to cut down on traffic. The Gateway project has a "nice vision" but "may not be realistic". She noted that page 15 of the report shows new areas dedicated to cars. New residences = more cars, she said. There will be more cars coming and going to and from the center of town, more traffic and more congestion. Mr. Longo acknowledged that there is a need to study the traffic and how it will be affected by the Gateway plan.

A resident of Phillips Street stated that the voice of the residents indicates that they want to preserve the character of the town and the neighborhood. There is a need to enforce the codes against noise and bad behavior. She noted that an area bordering on the university will attract students.

Hwei-Ling Greeney of 76 McClellan Street spoke as a resident of the area and as Chair of the Committee on Homelessness. She noted that Mount Pleasant Apartments would be a good site for housing extremely low-income households. She has been talking with the owners of the property and with the Interfaith Housing group. There is money available from CDBG and from Interfaith Housing to do this. There could be 12-14 units in the front house and 2 units in the back house, she said. These could be rented for \$300 to \$500 per month. Amherst needs a balanced and diverse housing stock and we should also be thinking about people who have less. As a resident Ms. Greeney welcomes the extremely low income people who are already in the neighborhood. There are no negative impacts from them now, she said. The Gateway process had been inclusive.

Mr. Crowner asked if the action steps that are recommended should be taken sequentially or simultaneously. Mr. Longo stated that the majority of the action steps can and should be taken right away. There is no hierarchy.

Mr. Tucker noted that the members of the Zoning Subcommittee are aware of how long it takes to do anything. The vision requires more detail and refinement. The form-based code needs to be developed. The town needs to find the money for taking the action steps. Representatives of the town government will be meeting with the state representatives in July to discuss funding sources.

Ms. Roberts commented that uncertainty may make it hard for people to decide what to do. The time to plan is when things are slow, she said. The community can decide what is right.

Mr. O'Keeffe noted that one of the first steps in the timing and sequencing is the transfer of the property from UMass to the town.

Mr. Kelly observed that problems in the neighborhood stem from properties that are not owner-occupied and that the town needs to be firm with enforcement.

Ms. Cullen noted that private owners like Hillel House will be catalysts for rehabilitating the neighborhood.

Mr. O’Keeffe stated that terms like “blighted” and “decadent” are words that have particular definitions in state law. They are not judgmental, but rather technical terms.

## **II. MINUTES**

Mr. Schreiber MOVED to approve the Minutes of June 1, 2011. Mr. Carson seconded and the vote was 6-0.

## **III. OLD BUSINESS – none**

## **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

**A.** Transportation Plan Task Force – Mr. Roznoy was not present and there was no discussion on this topic.

**B.** Other new information

Mr. Shefftz announced that Mr. Carson had been appointed to a second three-year term and Ms. Anderson had been appointed to a three-year term [after having served out the unexpired term of a member of the Board who had resigned]. Mr. O’Keeffe suggested scheduling the Board’s reorganization and elections on July 6<sup>th</sup> for a future date.

## **V. FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS**

The Board signed the ANR plan for ANR2011-00006 – Greg Keochakian c/o Hospice of the Fisher Home, 1165 North Pleasant Street.

## **VI. UPCOMING ZBA APPLICATIONS**

The Board declined to review the following ZBA applications:

ZBA FY2011-00025 – Pizza House of Amherst – 15-47 Montague Road, Unit 17B

ZBA FY2012-00001 – Ruth Hazard – 235 Pine Street

## **VII. UPCOMING SPP/SPR/SUB APPLICATIONS – none**

## **VIII. PLANNING BOARD SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS**

Zoning – Mr. O’Keeffe presented the report. The Zoning Subcommittee met this evening and discussed the input they had received at the Zoning Forum held on June 15<sup>th</sup>. The ZSC also planned its priorities going forward. The highest priorities are the Village Centers (North Amherst and Atkins Corner), but the members are also working on other issues, such as conversion of the Official Zoning Map from paper maps to digital [GIS] maps. Development Modification is still being studied and will probably be brought to Spring Town Meeting. There will be public meetings about the Village Center rezoning projects on Monday, July 25<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday, July 26<sup>th</sup>.

**IX. PLANNING BOARD COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS**

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission – Mr. Schreiber reported that the main order of business of the PVPC is the Valley Vision Update. This was briefly discussed with the Planning Board at the last meeting and will be discussed in greater depth at the July 6<sup>th</sup> meeting. The Planning Board had requested that certain changes be made to the maps. Most of the changes were made.

Community Preservation Act Committee – no report

Agricultural Commission – no report

Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee – no report

Amherst Redevelopment Authority – no report

**X. REPORT OF THE CHAIR – none**

**XI. REPORT OF STAFF – none**

**XII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Christine M. Brestrup, Senior Planner

Approved:

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Jonathan Shefftz, Chair

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_